

COVER UP



CDC reverses course on indoor masks in some parts of U.S.

In this Friday, March 5, 2021 file photo, a restaurant worker holds his face mask in Biloxi, Miss. On Friday, March 12, 2021.

Associated Press
Page 2

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CDC reverses course on indoor masks in some parts of U.S.

By MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reversed course Tuesday on some masking guidelines, recommending that even vaccinated people return to wearing masks indoors in parts of the U.S. where the coronavirus is surging.

Citing new information about the ability of the delta variant to spread among vaccinated people, the CDC also recommended indoor masks for all teachers, staff, students and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status. The new guidance follows recent decisions in Los Angeles and St. Louis to revert to indoor mask mandates amid a spike in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations



This March 6, 2020, file photo, shows the headquarters for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Associated Press

that have been especially bad in the South. The country is averaging more than 57,000 cases a day and 24,000 COVID-19 hospitalizations. Most new infections in the U.S. continue to be among unvaccinated people. But

"breakthrough" infections, which generally cause milder illness, can occur in vaccinated people. When earlier strains of the virus predominated, infected vaccinated people were found to have low levels of virus and were deemed

unlikely to spread the virus much, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said.

But with the delta variant, the level of virus in infected vaccinated people is "indistinguishable" from the level of virus in the noses and throats of unvaccinated people, Walensky said. The data emerged over the last couple of days from 100 samples. It is unpublished, and the CDC has not released it. But "it is concerning enough that we feel like we have to act," Walensky said.

Vaccinated people "have the potential to spread that virus to others," she said. For much of the pandemic, the CDC advised Americans to wear masks outdoors if they were within 6 feet of one another.

Then in April, as vaccination rates rose sharply, the agency eased its guidelines on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying that fully vaccinated Americans no longer needed to cover their faces unless they were in a big crowd of strangers. In May, the guidance was eased further for fully vaccinated people, allowing them to stop wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings. The guidance still called for wearing masks in crowded indoor settings, like buses, planes, hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters, but it cleared the way for re-opening workplaces and other venues.

Subsequent CDC guidance said fully vaccinated people no longer needed to wear masks at summer camps or at schools, either. For months COVID cases, deaths and hospitalizations were falling steadily, but those trends began to change at the beginning of the summer as the delta variant, a mutated

and more transmissible version of the virus, began to spread widely, especially in areas with lower vaccination rates.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the delta variant has changed the nation's COVID-19 outlook since the the CDC relaxed masking recommendations.

"That is their job. Their job is to look at evolving information, evolving data, an evolving historic pandemic and provide guidance to the American public," Psaki said.

"What has not changed," she added, "is the fact that people who are vaccinated have a huge deal of protection from serious illness, from hospitalization and from death."

Some public health experts said they thought the earlier CDC decision was based on good science, which indicated that the risk of vaccinated people spreading the virus was relatively low and that the risk of them catching the virus and becoming extremely ill was even lower.

But those experts were also critical, noting that there was no call for Americans to document their vaccination status, which created an honor system. Unvaccinated people who did not want to wear masks in the first place saw it as an opportunity to do what they wanted, they said.

"If all the unvaccinated people were responsible and wore mask indoors, we would not be seeing this surge," said Dr. Ali Khan, a former CDC disease investigator who now is dean of the University of Nebraska's College of Public Health.

Lawrence Gostin, a public health law professor at Georgetown University, drew a similar conclusion. □



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In 1st visit to intel agency, Biden warns of cyber conflict

By **NOMAAN MERCHANT**
and **ALEXANDRA JAFFE**
Associated Press

MCLEAN, Va. (AP) — President Joe Biden used his first visit with rank-and-file members of the U.S. intelligence community — a part of government that was frequently criticized by his predecessor Donald Trump — to make a promise that he will "never politicize" their work.

Biden waited more than six months to make the short drive across the Potomac River on Tuesday to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, giving analysts and national security leaders — often derided by Trump as the "deep state" — some breathing room. The president in his remarks to about 120 ODNI employees and senior leadership officials sought to make clear that he understood the complexity and critical nature of their work. The agency oversees the 17 other U.S. intelligence organizations.

"You have my full confidence," he said. "I know there's no such thing as 100% certainty in the intelligence world. Occasionally that happens. Rarely, rarely, rarely."

Biden told the audience that his administration would be "getting us back to the basics."

"I'll never politicize the work you do. You have my word on that," he said. "It's too important for our country." Biden also mentioned Russia and China as growing threats to American national security and noted the growing wave of cyberattacks, including ransomware attacks, against government agencies and private industry that U.S. officials have linked to agents in both countries.

"I think it's more likely ... if we end up in a war, a real shooting war with a major power, it's going to be as a consequence of a cyber breach of great consequence," Biden said.

Biden toured the National Counterterrorism Center Watch Floor, where analysts work to collect information and intelligence from vari-

ous sources to ascertain potential threats. He was accompanied on the tour by Avril Haines, director of national intelligence, and Christy Abizaid, director of the National Counterterrorism Center.

Trump visited the Central Intelligence Agency on his first full day in office, praising the agency but also airing personal grievances. Standing in front of CIA's memorial wall with stars marking each of the officers who have died while serving, Trump settled scores with the media and repeated false claims about the size of his inauguration crowd.

The relationship between the intelligence community and the president "went downhill from that very day," said Glenn Gerstell, who then served as general counsel of the National Security Agency and stepped down last year. Trump would go through four permanent or acting directors of national intelligence in four years and engaged in near-constant fights with the intelligence community.

In particular, he was angry about its assessment that Russia had interfered on his behalf in the 2016 presidential campaign and its role in revealing that Trump pressured Ukraine to investigate Biden, an action that ultimately led to Trump's first impeachment. Trump eventually fired the inspector general at the national intelligence office — the internal watchdog who brought that pressure to light.

By contrast, Biden has repeatedly insisted that he would not exert political pressure on intelligence agencies, a message repeated by his top appointees. He also came to office with a long history of working with intelligence officials as vice president and while serving in the Senate.

The president has already called on Haines with several politically sensitive requests. Perhaps the most prominent is an enhanced review of the origins of



President Joe Biden listens as Director of the National Counterterrorism Center Christine Abizaid speaks during a visit to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in McLean, Va., Tuesday, July 27, 2021.

Associated Press

COVID-19 as concerns increase among scientists that the novel coronavirus could have originated in a Chinese lab. Biden set a 90-day timeframe and

pledged to make the results of the review public. Haines and CIA Director Bill Burns are also investigating a growing number of reported injuries and illnesses

possibly linked to directed energy attacks in what's known as the "Havana syndrome." The CIA recently appointed a new director of its task force investigating Havana syndrome cases, an undercover official who participated in the hunt for Osama bin Laden. And intelligence agencies are having to adapt to the military withdrawal from Afghanistan, with growing concerns that the Taliban may topple the U.S.-backed central government.

Haines and Burns have also said that their review of COVID-19 origins may be inconclusive, probably disappointing lawmakers and observers who have pushed for more aggressive action against China. □

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Audit: Military personnel unprotected from toxic chemicals

By JOHN FLESHER**AP Environmental Writer**

The Defense Department has dragged its feet on protecting service personnel from "forever chemicals" at military installations and isn't doing enough to track health effects from exposure to the toxic compounds, according to an internal audit.

Officials have taken steps to find and clean groundwater contaminated with firefighting foam containing PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, the department's inspector general found. But its recently released report said the Pentagon has fallen short on dealing with other sources of the chemicals as its rules require.

It also found that despite plans to test military firefighters' blood for PFAS this year as required by Congress, officials have no plan for tracking and analyzing results on a department-wide basis.

The department "is missing an opportunity to capture comprehensive PFAS exposure data for DoD firefighters to be used for risk management, including future studies to assess significant long-term health effects relating to PFAS," according to the audit, which is dated July 22.

The report included responses from two assistant secretaries of defense who largely agreed with the



In this June 7, 2018, file photo, PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, foam gathers at the the Van Etten Creek dam in Oscoda Township, Mich., near Wurtsmith Air Force Base.

Associated Press

findings and promised to address them. The inspector general said the case will remain open until its recommendations are carried out.

"This inspector general's report confirms that the Defense Department must urgently do more to protect service members and their families from PFAS chemicals," Rep. Dan Kildee, a Michigan Democrat and co-chairman of the Congressional PFAS Task Force, said Tuesday.

A Pentagon spokesman had no immediate comment.

PFAS refers to thousands of man-made compounds

used in countless products, including nonstick cookware, water-repellent sports gear, cosmetics and grease-resistant food packaging, along with firefighting foams.

Public health studies on exposed populations have associated the chemicals with an array of health problems, including some cancers, weakened immunity and low birth weight. Widespread testing in recent years has found high levels of PFAS in many public water systems. They're called "forever chemicals" because they don't degrade in the environment. PFAS substances have

been found in groundwater on or near more than 300 military bases, according to the nonprofit Environmental Working Group.

Military crews began using foam containing PFAS to extinguish petroleum-based fires in the 1970s, the audit said. The Pentagon was informed in 2000 that leading manufacturers were phasing out products, including foam, made with some of the chemicals after one was found to be toxic and to build up in blood over time.

Yet the department waited until 2011 to issue an alert and took an additional five years to list risk-man-

agement actions such as preventing uncontrolled releases of the foam during training and removal where practical, according to the audit.

"Some of highest detections anywhere in the world been found in groundwater" at military installations, said Scott Faber, the Environmental Working Group's senior vice president for government affairs. That means personnel "were drinking extraordinarily polluted water for much longer than they should have been, in violation of the department's own policies."

In recent years, the Pentagon has tested wells and groundwater at bases for two widely used PFAS chemicals and begun removing foam containing one of them from its stockpiles, the audit said.

But aside from firefighting foam, the department hasn't addressed potential pollution from other PFAS-containing materials as its rules require, the report said.

"As a result, people and the environment may continue to be exposed to preventable risks," it said.

In comments attached to the report, acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment Paul Cramer said risk management options for PFAS-containing materials other than foam would be developed by early 2022. □

Man honors 9/11 crews with Boston-New York drink cart push



In this Tuesday, July 20, 2021, photo, Paul Veneto of Braintree, Mass., pushes an airline service cart in Boston.

Associated Press

BRAINTREE, Mass. (AP) — A former flight attendant

who lost several colleagues when United Flight 175 was

flown into the World Trade Center's south tower in New York on Sept. 11, 2001, is honoring his friends on the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks by pushing an airline beverage cart from Boston to ground zero. Pushing a cart is familiar to Paul Veneto, 62, who spent 30 years as a flight attendant for five different airlines.

Flight 175 was his regularly scheduled flight. He had flown into Boston the night before and Sept. 11 was his day off, he told The Patriot Ledger of Quincy. He was helping a friend build

a concrete wall at the time of the attacks, and didn't even know at first the second plane to hit the towers was his regular flight.

When he found out, "I was in shock," he said. "I wanted revenge. I was angry and I knew there was nothing I could do."

The purpose of his journey, called Paulie's Push, is to recognize the crews on all four 9/11 flights. "They were the first first responders. They were heroes. They were absolute heroes," he said. The trek will benefit the 9/11 crew members' families' registered nonprofit organi-

zations and Power Forward 25, a nonprofit that assists people dealing with addiction. The attacks fueled his addiction to the opioids he had been prescribed for a back problem while he continued to work. But the 10th anniversary of the attacks sent him into a tailspin, and he retired.

It took him five more years to beat his drug habit. He has been training for the roughly 220-mile (350-kilometer) walk since October, pushing the cart around his hometown of Braintree and Quincy, up to 16 miles (26 kilometers) per day. □

First person tried under Hong Kong security law found guilty

By **ALICE FUNG**

Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — The first person to be tried under Hong Kong's sweeping national security law was found guilty of secessionism and terrorism on Tuesday in a ruling closely watched for indications of how the law will be applied as China tightens its grip on the city long known for its freedoms. Tong Ying-kit was charged with inciting secession and terrorism for driving his motorcycle into a group of police officers last year while carrying a flag bearing the banned protest slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times." Rights groups condemned his conviction, and many are bracing for further such trials since more than 100 people have been arrested under the legislation part of Beijing's increasing crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong following months of anti-government protests in 2019.

Tong, a 24-year-old restaurant worker, pleaded not guilty to the charges, arguing the slogan itself does not call for secession. He now faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, but his lawyers are expect-



In this July 6, 2020, file photo, Tong Ying-kit arrives at a court in a police van in Hong Kong.

Associated Press

ed to argue for a lighter punishment at his sentencing hearing Thursday.

The new national security legislation not only resulted in the charges against Tong, but it also spelled out how the trial would be conducted.

The proceedings, which ended July 20, were held in the Hong Kong High Court with no jury, under rules allowing the exception from Hong Kong's common

law system if state secrets need to be protected, foreign forces are involved or if the personal safety of jurors needs to be protected. Trials are presided over by judges handpicked by Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam.

Reading the verdict, Justice Esther Toh said Tong "committed terrorist activities causing or intended to cause grave harm to the society" in pursuit of a po-

litical agenda.

His behavior was an act of violence aimed at coercing the central and Hong Kong governments and intimidating the public and carrying the flag constituted an act of incitement to secession, she said.

Tong did not speak during the reading of the verdict. He waved to his parents and others in the gallery as he was escorted from the chamber.

Tong's defense lawyer has said it's impossible to prove that Tong was inciting secession merely by having used the slogan.

The defense also said there is no evidence that Tong committed the act deliberately, that he tried to avoid crashing into officers and that his actions couldn't be considered terrorism since there was no serious violence or harm to society.

The verdict was immediately condemned by Amnesty International, which called it "the beginning of the end for freedom of expression in Hong Kong."

"People should be free to use political slogans during protests, and Tong Ying-kit should not be punished for exercising his right to free speech," Asia-Pacific Regional Director Yamini Mishra said in an emailed statement. "It is particularly clear that he should never have been charged with a 'national security' offense carrying a possible life sentence."

Beijing has dismissed criticisms, saying it is merely restoring order to the city and instituting the same type of national security protections found in other countries. □

1 killed, 4 missing in German chemical blast; 31 injured

By **KIRSTEN GRIESHABER**

Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — An explosion at an industrial park for chemical companies in Germany killed at least one person Tuesday, with 31 others injured and four

missing. Fire officials who tested the air said there did not appear to be a danger to nearby residents after authorities initially urged people to shelter inside.

The explosion at the waste

management facility of the Chempark site in the city of Leverkusen, near Cologne, sent a large black cloud into the air. It took firefighters almost four hours to extinguish the fire that took hold after the explosion.

Germany's Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance initially classified the incident as "an extreme threat." Later on Tuesday, however, the Cologne fire department tweeted that measurements of the air's pollution "do not show any kind of abnormality." They said the smoke had gone down but that they would continue to measure the air for toxins.

The city of Leverkusen said in a statement that

the explosion occurred in storage tanks for solvents. Police said Tuesday afternoon that 31 people were injured, with five of them in intensive care. They didn't give any details on their identities, the age of the dead person and the injured people because not all family members had been informed yet.

"We are deeply concerned about this tragic accident and the death of our employee," the head of Chempark, Lars Friedrich, told reporters in Leverkusen. "We are doing everything to get this situation under control as quickly as possible we know that the people of Leverkusen are very concerned."

City officials asked all resi-

dents to stay inside until the late afternoon and warned people from outside of Leverkusen to avoid the region.

City officials later also warned people not to let children play outside, use outside pools or eat fruit and vegetables from their backyards in the coming days. They said experts would only be able to tell in a few days how toxic the soot of the explosion would be.

Currenta, the company operating the chemical park, said the explosion happened at 9:40 a.m. and then developed into a fire. They said three big tanks were affected by the explosion, but that it was too early to know the cause of the explosion. □



A dark cloud of smoke rises above the Chempark in Leverkusen, Germany, Tuesday, July 27, 2021.

Associated Press

Human Rights Watch: Israeli war crimes apparent in Gaza war

By JOSEF FEDERMAN

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Human Rights Watch on Tuesday accused the Israeli military of carrying out attacks that “apparently amount to war crimes” during an 11-day war in May against the Hamas militant group.

The international human rights organization issued its conclusions after investigating three Israeli airstrikes that it said killed 62 Palestinian civilians. It said “there were no evident military targets in the vicinity” of the attacks.

The report also accused Palestinian militants of apparent war crimes by launching over 4,000 unguided rockets and mortars at Israeli population centers. Such attacks, it said, violate “the prohibition against deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians.”

The report, however, focused on Israeli actions during the fighting, and the group said it would issue a separate report on the actions of Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in August.

“Israeli forces carried out attacks in Gaza in May that devastated entire families without any apparent military target nearby,” said Gerry Simpson, associate crisis and conflict director at HRW.

He said Israel’s “consistent unwillingness to seriously investigate alleged war crimes,” coupled with Palestinian rocket fire at Israeli civilian areas, underscored the importance of an ongoing investigation into both sides by the International Criminal Court, or ICC.

In a statement, the Israeli army said its attacks were aimed at military targets and that it took numerous precautions to avoid harming civilians. It said Hamas is responsible for civilian casualties because it launches attacks from residential areas.

“While the terror organizations in the Gaza Strip deliberately embed their military assets in densely populated civilian areas, the IDF takes

every feasible measure to minimize, as much as possible, the harm to civilians and civilian property,” it said.

The war erupted on May 10 after Hamas fired a barrage of rockets toward Jerusalem in support of Palestinian protests against Is-

stroyed three apartment buildings and killed a total of 44 civilians, HRW said, including 18 children and 14 women. Twenty-two of the dead were members of a single family, the al-Kaw-laks.

The Israeli military said the attacks were aimed at

militant groups, not Israeli airstrikes. It released aerial photos of what it said was the launch site, some 7.5 kilometers (4.5 miles) away, and the landing area. It also said it did not carry out any strikes in the area at the time of the explosion. But based on an analysis

Israel said the target was a group of senior Hamas officials hiding in an apartment, and that the civilian deaths were unintended and “under review.”

But Human Rights Watch said it found no evidence of a military target at or near the site and called for an investigation into whether there was a legitimate military objective and “all feasible precautions” were taken to avoid civilian casualties. HRW investigators concluded the building was hit by a U.S.-made guided missile.

The May conflict was the fourth war between Israel and Hamas since the Islamic militant group, which opposes Israel’s existence, seized control of Gaza in 2007. Human Rights Watch, other rights groups and U.N. officials have accused both sides of committing war crimes in all of the conflicts.

Early this year, HRW accused Israel of being guilty of international crimes of apartheid because of discriminatory policies toward Palestinians, both inside Israel as well as in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel rejected the accusations.

In Tuesday’s report, HRW called on the United States to condition security assistance to Israel on it taking “concrete and verifiable actions” to comply with international human rights law and to investigate past abuses.

It also called on the ICC to include the recent Gaza war in its ongoing investigation into possible war crimes by Israel and Palestinian militants. Israel does not recognize the court’s jurisdiction and says it is capable of investigating any possible wrongdoing by its army and that the ICC probe is unfair and politically motivated.

In Gaza, Hamas spokesman Bassam Naim called for Israeli leaders to be brought before “international tribunals.”

He also claimed that the Hamas rocket fire was a “legitimate right to resist the occupation.” □



In this May 13, 2021, file photo, smoke rises following Israeli airstrikes on a building in Gaza City.

Associated Press

rael’s heavy-handed policing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, built on a contested site sacred to Jews and Muslims, and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers in a nearby neighborhood. Israel has said it struck over 1,000 targets during the fighting. In all, some 254 people were killed in Gaza, including at least 67 children and 39 women, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Hamas has acknowledged the deaths of 80 militants, while Israel has claimed the number is much higher. Twelve civilians, including two children, were killed in Israel, along with one soldier.

The HRW report looked into Israeli airstrikes. The most serious, on May 16, involved a series of strikes on Al-Wahda Street, a central thoroughfare in downtown Gaza City. The airstrikes de-

troyed three apartment buildings and killed a total of 44 civilians, HRW said, including 18 children and 14 women. Twenty-two of the dead were members of a single family, the al-Kaw-laks. In its investigation, HRW concluded that Israel had used U.S.-made GBU-31 precision-guided bombs, and that it did not warn residents to evacuate the area ahead of time. It also found no evidence of military targets in the area.

“An attack that is not directed at a specific military objective is unlawful,” it wrote.

The investigation also looked at a May 10 explosion that killed eight people, including six children, near the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun. It said the two adults were civilians.

In its statement, the Israeli military said the casualties were caused by errant rocket fire launched by

of munition remnants and witness accounts, HRW said evidence indicated the weapon had been “a type of guided missile” used by Israel.

“Human Rights Watch found no evidence of a military target at or near the site of the strike,” it said. The New York-based group said that Israel refused to allow its investigators to enter Gaza.

Instead, it said it relied on a field researcher based in Gaza, along with satellite images, expert reviews of photos of munitions fragments and interviews conducted by video and telephone.

The third attack HRW investigated occurred on May 15, in which an Israeli airstrike destroyed a three-story building in Gaza’s Shati refugee camp. The strike killed 10 people, including two women and eight children.



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Concern rises over anti-corruption efforts in Guatemala

By SONIA PÉREZ D.
Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) —

The firing of Guatemala's top anti-corruption prosecutor and new allegations that someone close to the attorney general was soliciting bribes for protection from investigations have increased concerns that what little capacity the country still had to battle corruption is being dismantled from within.

Juan Francisco Sandoval, head of the anti-impunity special prosecutor's office, was dismissed Friday and fled the country that same night. Attorney General Consuelo Porras accused him of ideologically biased investigations. She

had reassigned another prosecutor from his office a day earlier. Then Sunday, lawyer Marco Aurelio Alveño Hernández said he had told Sandoval's office that one of his clients, a former Guatemalan central banker, had paid a bribe through Alveño to an adviser of Porras so his corruption case was moved from Sandoval's office to another prosecutor.

Alveño fled the country Sunday with his family fearing potential retribution for his cooperation with Sandoval's office.

He said the move also raises the possibility the justice system could be manipulated to punish Sandoval and the judges who

ruled on the cases that he brought. Sandoval had said as much about his firing. He accused Porras of blocking his office's investigations, including those touching President Alejandro Giammattei, who has spoken of his friendship with Porras. The administration denied any involvement, saying it respected the attorney general's autonomy. U.S. officials condemned Sandoval's firing.

"We stand with the people of Guatemala and with Prosecutor Juan Francisco Sandoval, whom I recognized this year with an Anticorruption Champion Award. His dismissal undermines the rule of law and strengthens the forces of



A woman holds an image of anti-corruption prosecutor Juan Francisco Sandoval during a rally showing their support for Sandoval, in Guatemala City, Saturday, July 24, 2021.

Associated Press

impunity. Guatemalans deserve better," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said via Twitter on Sunday. □

Haiti arrests top security official in slain president probe

By EVENS SANON
Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti

(AP) — Authorities in Haiti arrested a top official who served as general security coordinator when President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated, his attorney told The Associated Press

on Monday. Jean Laguel Civil joins more than two dozen suspects arrested by Haiti National Police as the investigation continues into the July 7 attack at Moïse's private home. Civil's attorney, Reynold Georges, called his client's arrest politically motivated.

ed. It wasn't immediately clear if Civil had been charged with anything. The arrest comes as more than 1,000 demonstrators gathered around one of Haiti's most notorious gang leaders to commemorate Moïse. The crowd was mostly dressed in white as they cheered on Jimmy Cherizier, a former police officer who now leads "G9," a federation of nine gangs that officials have blamed for a spike in violence and kidnappings in recent months.

"Everyone needs to wait on my order before we respond to the killing of Jovenel Moïse," said Cherizier, who goes by the name of "Barbecue" and whom police say is behind several recent massacres that targeted civilians living in communities run by other gangs. □



Jimmy Cherizier, alias Barbecue, a former police officer who heads a gang coalition known as "G9 Family and Allies," march during a rally to demand justice for slain Haitian President Jovenel Moïse in Lower Delmas, a district of Port-au-Prince, Haiti Monday, July 26, 2021.

Associated Press



infini
by Urvin Croes

Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

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New beginnings after the kitchen table and beyond with new restaurant: Infini by Chef Urvin Croes

PALM BEACH — After spearheading *The Kitchen Table* for five years, receiving notable recognitions in *USA Today*, *The Daily Meal* and earning the #1 spot on Tripadvisor's list of Fine Dining Restaurants in the Caribbean, Chef Urvin Croes has now moved on to higher heights. Infini, his new chef's table, which opened at the Blue Residences in November 2020, allows the Michelin-trained Aruban culinary artist to create gastronomic experiences unconfined by cultural or regional expectations. The former *The Kitchen Table* space has since been renovated into a suitable culinary studio to host this vision. In describing these changes, Croes says: "We opened up the entire kitchen and elevated the dining tables so guests have a front row stadium-like view of each step of the preparations. The spotlights, which we carefully choreograph, follow the plates' transition from blank canvas into culinary works of art."

"It is a flavor that you cannot define, but you can create."

He had been sitting on the first menu for over a year. Inspired by umami, one of the five basic tastes, and also Japanese for "essence of deliciousness", Chef Croes strived to organically produce this palate in each dish of the eight-course Chef's Impression. "It is a flavor that you cannot define, but you can create. Take our popular langoustine for example; we combined elements that are rarely paired together: the bitter, sour and salty flavors of the lemon cream, kombucha, green grapes, watercress and achiote, fused with the sweet and delicate taste of the langoustine induce ultimate umami."

After hosting the first menu for three months, the Executive Chef introduced a second tour de force in February 2021 — this time a pescatarian menu dedicated to Lent, of which Croes has to say: "I wanted to focus on the finest fish in the world, they are the protagonists of this season." Visitors can experience the second Chef's Impression until May 2021,

at which point Croes and his team will reveal exciting new flavors for the summer.

"Without a great team, there is no great chef"

"There is very little I can do by myself. Without a great team, there is no great chef", says Croes, while raving about the six young professionals sharing his kitchen. All graduates of Aruba's EPI College and familiar faces to the Chef as each one has completed their culinary internship under his guidance. In fact, Infini's Chef de Cuisine, Ashwin Maduro, was Urvin's very first student, before relocating to Amsterdam, where he worked at several Michelin-starred restaurants, including &mo-shik (formally &Samhoud Places). Having recently returned to Aruba, Chef Maduro is thrilled to be reunited with his first mentor and hopes to secure Aruba's space on the global map of unique culinary experiences. Similarly, after four years working in the two-Michelin starred restaurant Spectrum, Chef de Partie Moises Ramirez returned home to share his vast experience in formulating recipes with meticulous attention to detail and consistency. Further down the kitchen line, Chef de Partie Alvaro Yi, who has worked at the two-Michelin starred FG Restaurant, is all about expressing himself through cooking and plating to create art that you can eat. Mixologist Marc-Anthony Rannis brings eight years of experience in the fine dining industry to Infini. His fine craftsmanship is displayed in the unparalleled wine pairings and signature cocktails, which include his personally homemade syrups, garnishes and fresh local ingredients. Maître D' and Junior Sommelier Jessica Theysen, who previously managed renowned Chef Dennis Huwaë's Restaurant Daalder in Amsterdam, is a true storyteller. From the moment she serves the Salinity welcome drink and the culinary tale begins, she takes you on an adventure around the world to discover never-before-tasted combinations. Then, towards the end of the night, it is his time to shine — Pastry Chef Jean-Claude Werleman, that is. After spending the last



two years perfecting his recipes in the Pastry Department of the Ritz Carlton Aruba, Werleman joins Infini to continue exploring his passion for experimenting with colors and bold flavors.

"It's time to show that Aruba is a culinary destination of its own"

"The goal is to leave our visitors speechless. The look on their faces whenever they take the first bite says it all and it is priceless", shares Croes, with a smile. Reclaiming the spot of number one restaurant in the Caribbean is also in sight, but this time he will not stop there. "In the end, we want Aruba to be recognized for its culinary mastery. We have trained the best culinary artists right here on the island and they have proven themselves internationally in the most renowned kitchens in the world. Now it is time to show that Aruba is a culinary destination of its own. Who knows where that will take us; hopefully to infinity and beyond."

Infini located at Blue Residences currently serves an eight-course Chef's Impression to up to 21 guests starting at 6:30PM. To make reservations visit www.infiniaruba.com or call +297-699-3982. □



infini
by Urvin Croes



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Wednesday

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The Brownstone Ribs & Seafood | Subway

Airlines are seeing significant demand for Aruba:
More airlines adding service to AUA Airport for the winter season

ORANJESTAD – Aruba Airport Authority N.V. (AAA) company that manages Queen Beatrix International Airport (AUA Airport), is excited to share some recent updates on the air travel schedules for the coming winter season.

AUA Airport's airline partner Delta Air Lines will resume the Boston-Aruba service starting December 18, 2021, through May 3, 2022, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. This 4-days-a-week pattern will be provided on a 738 aircraft (157 seats). The complete Delta schedule for the Winter Season is as follows: Daily Atlanta-Aruba service, daily New York (JFK)-Aruba service, and the Boston-Aruba service. Winter season officially starts on October 31, 2021.

Another very positive news is that

Canada has re-opened its borders for international travel. The three big Canadian carriers announced plans to double seats from Toronto to Aruba this winter. The restart dates for Canada-Aruba for the winter season are as follows:

- Sunwing will start flying to Aruba once a week as of September 6, 2021 and will increase to 3 times a week for the winter season.
- Air Canada will resume two weekly services as of October 3, 2021, and these will increase to 4 times a week for the winter season.
- WestJet will resume two weekly flights for fall as of November 6, 2021 and will increase to 4 times a week for the winter season.

Between January, February, and March 2022, AUA Airport will have

11 weekly nonstop (vs. six weekly flights in 2019) services from Toronto. These updated schedules are good news that AUA Airport has been longing for: "We are very excited to see a very positive and upwards trend in air travel. Airlines are seeing great demand for premium travel markets and are constantly adapting their schedules to meet those demands. It results in a lot of additional capacity for our market. We are fortunate to be considered one of the leading destinations, and we take this fact very seriously. We foresee a busy winter season, with a diverse portfolio of travel options to and from Aruba," said AAA's Air Service Development Manager Jo-Anne Meaux-Arends. For the latest updated Flight Schedules, please visit www.airportaruba.com and click on Flight Schedules.

About AUA Airport

AUA Airport is one of the busiest airports in the Caribbean region, with 19 different airlines operating into Aruba contributing in processing over 2.5 million passengers per year (pre-covid) and providing air service to 20 destinations worldwide. AUA Airport is operationally solid where over 95% of all visitors are leisure guests: 83% from the United States & Canada, 6% from Latin America, 8% from Europe, and 3% from Dutch Caribbean, year to date, March 2021. AUA Airport attributes this to the island's stable economic and political climate, hospitable and multilingual population, and safe environment. AUA Airport undergoes continuous upgrades to maintain its position as one of the region's most innovative airports. □

CARIBBEAN LINKED VI

ORANJESTAD — The regional residency Caribbean Linked VI, co-managed by Ateliers '89 (Aruba), The Fresh Milk Art Platform (Barbados) and ARC Magazine will be changing its focus this year in light of the severe impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon the lives of artists regionally. Caribbean Linked VI will be conducting all of its programming and support virtually from July 30th – August 31st, 2021, with live public conversations between the artists taking place on Wednesday, August 11th and Tuesday, August 31st from 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm AST on each day. As usual, the residency's programming supports creatives across the French, Spanish, English and Dutch speaking Caribbean.

Participating artists for Caribbean

Linked VI include Claudio Arnell (Saint Martin), Taisha Carrington (Barbados), Romelinda Maldonado (Aruba), Akley Olton (St. Vincent and the Grenadines), Susana Pilar (Cuba), John Reno Jackson (Cayman Islands), Sara-bel Santos-Negrón (Puerto Rico), Samuel Sarmiento (Aruba/Venezuela) and Béliza Troupé (Guadeloupe). This residency will allow the participants to be exposed to the practices of other emerging Caribbean artists, providing an opportunity to strengthen regional connections and cultural understanding. This edition of Caribbean Linked is being conceptualised as a bridging year, with participating artists still scheduled to meet physically in August 2022 at Ateliers '89 in Oranjestad, Aruba.

Now more than ever in light of COVID-19, it is critical to mitigate isolation and use available technologies to advance creative production, critical thinking and engagement. This preliminary remote encounter is focused on provisioning artists with dedicated studio time to make new works, while reinforcing the value of Caribbean artists' practices and enabling their growth and development.

The writer in residence for the virtual edition will be Ethan Knowles, an emerging scholar and writer from The Bahamas currently studying in Rome, Italy. This year's specially invited curators will be Sofía Olascoaga, an academic curator at MUAC (Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo – UNAM) in Mexico City, where she



coordinates Campus Expandido an academic programme of critical theory, and Miguel A. López, former chief curator of TEOR/ética turned independent curator living and working in Lima, Peru.

The month long residency will be supported by the generous funding provided by BankGiro Loterij Fonds, Mondriaan Fonds and UNOCA.

For more information go to www.caribbeanlinked.com. □

Today's
Happening



A selection of where to go while in Aruba



Thursday 29

Play more. Earn More. Enjoy More

- Feeling lucky today? Try your luck at any of the 17 table games and a spectacular selection of over 300 spinning reels, video reels, and more at Aruba's most luxurious casino. Extraordinary moments await at The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba.
- From 10 AM – 2 AM
- The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba
- Facebook: The casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba

Friday 30

Pinchos Grill & Bar

- Enjoy a unique experience during sunset or at night over the clear blue waters of Aruba at this chic grill and bar on a pier. Specialized on Grilled seafood, steaks and much more. All you need is a cocktail, a nice breeze, delicious food and great company!
- 5 PM-10 PM
- L.G. Smith Blvd 7, Surfside Marina, Oranjestad
- For reservations call (+297)583-2666
- Facebook: Pinchos Grill & Bar



Saturday 31

Saturday Box Special at Bits & Cheeses by Deli297

- Enjoy a tasteful experience in a cozy and peaceful atmosphere. Bits & Cheeses offers a great variety of the best specialty Cheeses, Charcuterie, Butter & Wines. On Saturday's ask for the 'Box for 2' with 3 types of cheese & charcuterie with additives such as fruits, nuts and crackers. Can't pick up? They can deliver for a small fee.
- Available Saturday 5 PM-10 PM
- Pre order via whatsapp at (+297)5665264
- Located at Wilhelminastraat 63, downtown Oranjestad, (across El Gaucho restaurant)
- Facebook: Bits&Cheeses by Deli297



Sunday 1

Blissful brunch at Holiday Inn

- Sundays are for brunch and mimosas. Jump-start your day and let's do brunch. Relax, dive in and look around to make your selection at the extensive salad station, soup station, Asian station, carving station, Aruban station, fruit station and bread station. All your breakfast and lunch favorites are here.
- From 11 AM to 2 PM
- Corals Restaurant at Holiday Inn Beach Resort Aruba
- For reservations call +297 586 3600
- Facebook: Holiday Inn Beach Resort Aruba



Monday 2

Local Arts & Craft Fair at Elements Restaurant

- Immerse in local culture and savor the music, art, and flavors of the island at this wonderful local arts & craft fair at Elements Restaurant. Have a truly local experience every Monday with an authentic Aruban dinner and Aruban arts. Find the perfect locally-made gift for yourself or your loved ones.
- Starts at 5 PM
- Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort
- Facebook: Elements Restaurant Aruba



Tuesday 3

Hands of Gold Massage & Beauty on wheels

- After a very busy week all you need now is to pamper yourself with a relaxing massage or a skin care & body treatment at the comfort of your own room. Mary of Hands of Gold Massage is ready to give you that much needed treatment you deserve. Discover the secret of relaxation.
- Available daily from 9 AM- 7 PM
- For reservations call/Whatsapp Mary at +297-733-5034
- Instagram page: handsofgoldmassage&beauty

Wednesday 4

It's Winesday at Rooftop Sunset Bistro at Radisson Blu

- Enjoy panoramic ocean views while enjoying the fresh breeze and a glass of wine. Gather up the squad and find out why Sunset Bistro is the next hotspot for a bite, a drink or more.
- Starts at 12 PM, every Wednesday
- Radisson Blu is located at J.E. Irausquin Blvd 97, Palm Beach
- Facebook: Radisson Blu Aruba



\$15 wage becoming a norm as employers struggle to fill jobs

By **CHRISTOPHER RUGABER**

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The signs and banners are dotted along suburban commercial strips and hanging in shop windows and restaurants, evidence of a new desperation among America's service-industry employers: "Now Hiring, \$15 an hour."

It is hardly the official federal minimum wage — at \$7.25, that level hasn't been raised since 2009 — but for many lower-skilled workers, \$15 an hour has increasingly become a reality.

Businesses, particularly in the restaurant, retail and travel industries, have been offering a \$15 wage to try to fill enough jobs to meet surging demand from consumers, millions of whom are now spending freely after a year in lockdown. And many of the unemployed, buoyed by stimulus checks and expanded jobless aid, feel able to hold out for higher pay.

The change since the pandemic has been swift. For years, and notably in the 2020 presidential race, labor advocates had trumpeted \$15 an hour as a wage that would finally allow low-paid workers to afford basic necessities and narrow inequality. It struck many as a long-term goal. Now, many staffing companies say \$15 an hour is the level that many businesses must pay to fill their jobs.

"That number is not a coincidence," said Aaron Sojourner, an economist at the University of Minnesota. "It's the number that those activists and workers put on the table 10 years ago, and built a movement towards." Even so, millions of Americans are still earning less than \$15 an hour. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office calculates that even by 2025, roughly 17 million workers will remain below that level.

Yet at ZipRecruiter, the number of job postings on the site that are advertising \$15 an hour has more than doubled since 2019, said Julia Pollak, labor economist for the company. The



Steven Dyme, owner of Flowers for Dreams, poses for a portrait at his warehouse Friday, July 23, 2021, in Chicago.

proportion of jobs that offer 401(k) retirement accounts, flexible scheduling, signing bonuses and other benefits has risen, too.

The beneficiaries are people like Maggie Himmel, who started working at the Flowers for Dreams flower shop in Milwaukee last fall for \$12.50 an hour. In January, the company raised its minimum wage to \$15. The higher pay allowed Himmel, 22, to move into her own apartment after sharing living space with her sister. She is earning more than she did before the pandemic, when she worked part time at a flower shop in Kalamazoo, Michigan, for about \$11 an hour. Steven Dyme, the owner of Flowers for Dreams, said the \$15 minimum made it much easier for him to staff up once the economy reopened this spring and demand for flowers, particularly for weddings, soared.

Dyme, whose company has four locations — one in Chicago, one in Milwaukee and two in Detroit — says he's fully staffed, with 80 full- and part-time workers.

At \$15 an hour, he said, "I saw a markedly different picture in how fast we could recruit and in the experience level of workers." Mathieu Stevenson, the CEO of Snagajob, a site for hourly workers, says a hand-

ful of restaurant chains are going so far as to offer retirement plans — he calls it the "white collarization" of blue collar jobs — as benefits once reserved for professionals are being offered to some service workers.

"The \$15 an hour debate," Stevenson said, "is essentially being resolved through market forces."

Yet other trends have also helped drive the movement toward a \$15 wage. The Fight for \$15 labor movement has organized strikes by fast food workers and has lobbied states and cities for higher minimum wages. Thirty states and the District of Columbia have adopted wage floors that exceed the \$7.25 federal minimum. Eleven states have passed laws that will lift their minimum wages to \$15 over time. Among them is Florida, where voters last year approved a measure raising the minimum to \$15 by 2026.

Other states on track to a \$15 an hour wage floor include California, Illinois, New York and Virginia. Ben Zipperer, an economist at the liberal Economic Policy Institute, estimates that four in 10 workers live in states where the minimum is set to reach \$15 in the coming years.

The National Employment Law Project, an advocacy group for low-income work-

ers, calculates that 26 million people, or about 16% of workers, have received higher pay because of all the state and local minimum wage increases since 2012, though often to less than \$15 an hour.

The increases have disproportionately benefited Black and Hispanic workers, the report found. Historically, higher minimum wages have been found to reduce racial wage gaps. The \$7.25-an-hour federal minimum wage has now gone the longest stretch without an increase since it was first introduced in July 2009. Labor Department data showed that last year, only about 250,000 people — fewer than 0.5% of all workers — earned that wage. Many employers are having to pay more to keep up with larger companies, including Amazon, Costco and Target, that have announced their own pay raises to \$15 or more. More recently, Under Armour, Southwest Airlines and Best Buy have adopted \$15 wage floors.

Economic research has found that when a large company raises pay, nearby employers feel compelled to follow suit. A study led by Ellora Deroncourt, a Princeton University economist, found that companies in local markets that compete with

Amazon, Target or Walmart generally responded by matching their wage hikes dollar-for-dollar. Deroncourt's research also found that when companies seek to match the pay offered by their large competitors, they often end up employing fewer people, though the impact is relatively small.

Some economists argue that a federal minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour — more than double the current minimum — will cost jobs. The CBO, in its most recent assessment, said that it would mean 1.4 million fewer jobs by 2025. Yet the CBO also found that as many as 27 million people would receive pay increases.

One factor that's helping fuel higher wages is a change in outlook among many lower-paid workers, millions of whom were laid off when COVID-19 first erupted in the spring of 2020. Some who worked at grocery stores, restaurants or hotels now don't want to return to those jobs — at least at the same pay.

And three rounds of stimulus checks, plus a \$300-a-week federal unemployment benefit, have made it easier for them to turn down jobs that don't pay enough. Pollak, at ZipRecruiter, notes that with the extra unemployment benefit, jobless aid on average pays about \$625 a week — equivalent to about \$15 an hour. That's likely a big reason why a March survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found that workers without a college degree have raised the minimum pay they expect from a job by a whopping 26% from a year earlier.

Economists are uncertain whether or how long hefty pay gains will last. But many predict that when the \$300 federal benefit for the unemployed expires in September, schools reopen, and more mothers return to work with their children in school full time, the influx of workers will make it easier to hire and reduce the pressure on employers to raise wages. □

Associated Press

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

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17 Trembling 24 Like mice 33 "See ya!"

18 Keyed up and men 37 Fuming

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7-28

A X Y D L B A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

7-28 CRYPTOQUOTE

U M K O N Q A K N P A N H N J O V H

W M H A . M O M K O G A P A K Y V Z K A

O V O G A A P P V P O G N O J V L Z O K .

Z M Q Q M F M V T N Z Z M

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: GOD MADE THE WORLD ROUND SO WE COULD NEVER SEE TOO FAR DOWN THE ROAD. — ISAK DINESEN

Smart Eye Deputy CEO Rana el Kaliouby talks automotive AI

By MATT O'BRIEN
AP Technology Writer

Rana el Kaliouby co-founded and led Boston startup Affectiva, which uses artificial intelligence and computer vision to analyze mood and emotion.

Now she's got a new job as deputy CEO of Smart Eye, after the Swedish eye-tracking company bought Affectiva for \$73.5 million in June. The auto industry is the prime market for el Kaliouby and competitors like Australia-based Seeing Machines. Carmakers are bracing for new safety rules and standards around the world that could require dashboard cameras to detect dangerous driver behavior, especially in vehicles that are partly driving themselves but still need human attention.

El Kaliouby says that's just the beginning of where in-car AI systems are going. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Ten years from now, a family's in a car. What might your technology be doing on their trip?

A: OK, family's in the car. You've got two kids in the back seat. First of all, the kids are fighting. The car knows that and can see that mom, who's driving, is getting frustrated, a little mad, distracted. The car intervenes by recommending content for the kids — or through a conversational interface, mediating a game between the kids. They play for a little. They fall asleep. The car can see that so the lights dim and the music or movie turns off. Then the car realizes mom is exhausted and also starting to doze off, so it gets into this chatty mode to reengage her. And then mom leaves the car, forgets the child is in there, and gets a text message that says, "Oh, you may have forgotten Little Baby Joel! I'm making this up on the fly. It can basically personalize the whole cabin experience — music, lighting, temperature, based on knowing who's inside the car and what they're



This April 23, 2018 file photo shows Rana el Kaliouby, CEO of the Boston-based artificial intelligence firm, Affectiva, poses in Boston.

Associated Press

doing.

Q: What is Affectiva bringing to Smart Eye, and vice versa?

A: Smart Eye is a 22-year-old company. What they've been focused on the past couple years — and they are the undisputed market leader — is driver monitoring. They're able to very accurately determine where a person is looking and they also monitor eye behavior. They can identify when a driver is distracted or drowsy. They've been contracted by 13 global automakers. Affectiva spun out of MIT 12 years ago and our focus is humanizing technology by bringing emotional intelligence to machines. We project there's going to be an evolution in driver monitoring to everything that's happening inside the vehicle. What are their mood and emotions? What activities are they engaged with? You become the eyes and ears of the car.

Q: How do you detect someone's mood or emotions?

A: We do a lot of facial analysis but we've expanded to do a lot of body "key-point" tracking so we can detect what people are actually doing — are you slouched in the car? Are you agitated? We monitor all of that.

Q: What about someone's face will tell you they're panicked?

A. There are expressions of fear. You can also start tracking other vital signs,

like your heart rate or heart rate variability, breathing rate, via an optical sensor. That's a direction we're headed. It's not at all ready for prime time but it's something Affectiva and Smart Eye are exploring. And once you know a person's baseline, you can find out if they are deviating from that baseline and the car can flag that.

Q: How do you protect against concerns you can misread someone's emotion or mood based on race, gender, neurodiversity?

A: This is one of the things Affectiva's really bringing to the table. It's something we've been super intentional about. It starts with the diversity of the data. If you're training an algorithm using middle-aged white men, that's what it's going to learn. The training set is critical and it's everything from racial and ethnic diversity to diversity of facial appearances — maybe people are wearing glasses or hijabs or have beards. We're partnering with synthetic data companies to augment our data sets and fill in the gaps. The second thing is, how do you validate the accuracy of the algorithms? If you just look at high-level accuracy, it might be hiding biases that exist in specific subpopulations. We dissect the data to make sure no bias is creeping in. And finally, the diversity of the team is how you overcome these blind spots. □

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American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

AID FOUNDATIONS

FAVI- Visually Impaired
Tel. 582 5051

Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel. 736 2952

Narcotics Anonymous
Tel. 583 8989

Fundacion Contra Violencia
Relacional Tel. 583 5400

Centre for Diabetes
Tel. 524 8888

Child Abuse Prevention
Tel. 582 4433

Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

General Info

Phone Directory Tel. 118



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Emily Blunt transcends overstuffed 'Jungle Cruise'

By **LINDSEY BAHR**
AP Film Writer

Remember lighthearted throwback adventure movies? "The Mummy"? "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade"? "Pirates of the Caribbean"? The first one, at least? How about the classic romantic banter of a handsome but wholly mismatched pair in "Romancing the Stone" or "The African Queen"? "Jungle Cruise" certainly does and isn't about to let you forget it, either. This is a film whose sole purpose is to remind you of at least a dozen other movies that you remember fondly and coast from there. And it almost gets away with it thanks entirely to its charismatic and entirely game stars Emily Blunt and Dwayne Johnson, who mostly make you forget that you're watching a movie based on a theme park ride that seems to have been made-to-order at the nostalgia factory. Wearing inspirations on your sleeve isn't a cinematic crime, but "Jungle Cruise," directed by Jaume Collet-Serra and written by Glenn Ficarra, John Requa and Michael Green, often does so at its own detriment. The set-up is forgivably contrived involving Spanish conquistadors, a maniacal German prince (a bril-



This image released by Disney shows Emily Blunt, right, and Dwayne Johnson in a scene from "Jungle Cruise."

liantly over-the-top Jesse Plemons) and an earnest English woman, Blunt's Lily Houghton, who have all devoted their lives to finding a mythical cure-all called "Tears of the Moon." After a truly terrific introduction to Lily involving a solitary heist in a museum's archives, she and her dandy brother MacGregor (a scene-stealing Jack Whitehall) travel to the Amazon jungle where they enlist a struggling riverboat captain, Frank (Johnson), to lead them down the river in search of this flower.

"Jungle Cruise" is knowingly and enjoyably cartoonish from its production design to its costumes (although some of the CGI animals are distractingly artificial for a production of this size). But it gets bogged down by its own overexplained mythology when it could have simply sailed on the simple quest for a magical MacGuffin. Johnson's Frank is fun, though. The screenwriters have given him a boatload of cheesy puns as a nod to the theme park ride, and Johnson sells it like he

always does. He continues to be very watchable and light, and he and Blunt are clearly having a blast together. Their energy is infectious. Blunt, meanwhile, is wholly wonderful and operating on another level. She is completely and effortlessly at home as Lily, and it would be delightful to see this character again on the big screen. But there's also a big problem: "Jungle Cruise" does not work as the romance that it wants to be. Blunt and Johnson have terrific

chemistry and banter, just not the romantic kind. It's more of a platonic buddy cop partnership, which is perfectly fine, but the script tries to force it to be something else and it just feels false, especially as more and more of the plot hinges on Lily and Frank's relationship.

Also, despite herculean efforts, Blunt and Johnson can only do so much with a script that too often falls back on milquetoast zingers about Lily's pants, Frank's guitar and MacGregor's material obsessions. There's also some curious choices when it comes to how they frame the sexism and misogyny of the time: Is it believable that a group of male scientists who very recently lived under Queen Victoria would find it laughable to suggest that a woman could lead an Amazonian tribe?

Perhaps my expectations got a little too high over the course of the past year and all of my summer movie hopes started to rest on "Jungle Cruise." It is a fine adventure with two genuine movie stars that may very well become a re-watchable staple like the films it references. But on first watch, it mostly comes across as an earnest and safe homage. □

Associated Press

Hearing exposes TV viewers to blunt language, racial slurs



U.S. Capitol Police Sgt. Harry Dunn, right, watches a video being displayed during the House select committee hearing on the Jan. 6 attack on Capitol Hill in Washington, Tuesday, July 27, 2021.

Associated Press

By **DAVID BAUDER**
AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — People who watched the first day of a House investigation

into the Jan. 6 uprising at the U.S. Capitol on Tuesday were exposed to the sort of blunt language, including profanity and racial slurs,

rarely heard on daytime television. The hearing featured emotional testimony from four police officers who defended the Capitol and video clips of violence and mayhem. It was shown live widely, but not uniformly, on several television networks. Capitol Police Officer Harry Dunn, who is Black, said one rioter cursed him and called him the n-word, a phrase that was repeated and even chanted at him. Dunn didn't mask any language while describing it. Networks warned of graphic material in onscreen messages. In initial accounts of Dunn's testimony, The Washington Post, The New York Times and The

Associated Press all mentioned the slur but did not spell it out. CNN's website linked to a video with the headline, "Capitol police officer recounts rioters calling him the n-word." The video itself, after warning of graphic language, used Dunn's full quotes. Cable networks CNN, Fox News Channel and MSNBC carried the hearing, lasting more than three hours, in full. ABC pre-empted daytime programming to air most of it but not CBS and NBC. Instead of compelling their local stations to carry it, those networks said it was optional. It wasn't immediately clear how many CBS and NBC stations chose to air it, but

those in the New York and Los Angeles markets did not. Television executives argue that consumers have many more options to see such events than they did years ago, including live streaming.

"The fact is, people don't go to broadcast television for live, breaking news the way they used to," said Mark Lukasiewicz, who ran NBC News' special events unit until 2017 and is now dean of the School of Communication at Hofstra University.

Still, there's no better way to catch a casual viewer's attention and signal an event's importance than broadcast television special reports. □

Analysis: Rodgers' return to Green Bay makes most sense

By **STEVE MEGARGEE**
AP Sports Writer

Aaron Rodgers wasn't going to have a better chance to win a Super Bowl this season somewhere other than Green Bay.

The Packers weren't going to contend for a Super Bowl without Rodgers running the offense.

Given those two factors, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Rodgers was at Lambeau Field on Tuesday in the surest sign yet that the three-time MVP quarterback and Packers executives are at least temporarily putting aside their differences. The Packers hold their first training-camp workout Wednesday.

Rodgers skipped the Packers' mandatory minicamp after ESPN reported in the hours leading up to the draft that he wasn't interested in returning to Green Bay for a 17th season. Rodgers' arrival on Tuesday followed NFL Network and ESPN reports that the two sides were close to an agreement keeping him with the Packers this season. The long-term status of this relationship remains uncertain. ESPN reported the Packers agreed to drop the 2023 season from Rodgers' contract and review his situation with the team at the end of the season, potentially clearing the way for his eventual exit.



Green Bay Packers' Aaron Rodgers throws during NFL football training camp in Green Bay, Wis., in this Saturday, Aug. 15, 2020, file photo.

The exact reasons for Rodgers' discontent are not known. At least not publicly. Rodgers gave his biggest hints about his issues during an ESPN interview in late May.

"I think sometimes people forget what really makes an organization," Rodgers said at the time. "History is important, the legacy of so many people who've come before you. But the people, that's the most important thing. People make an organization. People make a business, and sometimes that gets forgotten. Culture is built

brick by brick, the foundation of it by the people, not by the organization, not by the building, not by the corporation. It's built by the people."

Packers CEO/president Mark Murphy defended the organization's culture during a news conference after the team's shareholders meeting Monday. But he also acknowledged the standoff with Rodgers had caused team officials to look inward.

"I think any organization, you reflect back and you evaluate the decisions you've made and things

you might have done differently, but I'm not going to share them here," Murphy said.

For now, they'll continue this uneasy marriage while seeking the Super Bowl title that has eluded both parties since the 2010 season. The Packers have lost in the NFC championship four of the last seven seasons, including each of the past two years.

The Packers are good enough to make another Super Bowl run, as long as it includes Rodgers.

Although the Packers' only major free-agent addition

from another organization was former Arizona Cardinals linebacker DeVondre Campbell, they spent big over the last 12 months to keep All-Pro offensive tackle David Bakhtiari, defensive tackle Kenny Clark and running back Aaron Jones, as well as cornerback Kevin King. If Rodgers had been traded, he couldn't have landed anywhere that offered him a better chance to win.

The Denver Broncos seemed the most natural trade possibility with their talented defense, promising receiving corps and uncertain quarterback situation. Rodgers could have made the Broncos instant playoff contenders but also would have needed to compete in the same division with Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs, whereas he makes the Packers clear favorites in the NFC North.

Given the Packers are built to win now, they couldn't afford to open the season with 2020 first-round pick Jordan Love as their starting quarterback. Love didn't play a single down in his rookie season and never even got to participate in any preseason games due to the pandemic. The Packers gave him the vast majority of reps in their minicamp just in case he needed to take over. □

Associated Press

Hamilton forms foundation in partnership with Mercedes

BRACKLEY, England (AP) — Lewis Hamilton launched a charitable foundation Tuesday that will both support diversity and inclusion in motorsports and empower underrepresented youth groups in Britain. The seven-time Formula One champion formed Mission 44 with a personal pledge of 20 million pounds (\$27.5 million) earmarked to support programs and organizations that narrow the gap in employment and education systems. Additionally, Hamilton

partnered with his Mercedes team on the "Ignite" initiative to focus on ensuring better representation of "diverse students studying STEM and engineering, as well as wider parts of the industry." Ignite will work closely with Mission 44.

The initiatives stemmed from findings of The Hamilton Commission, which was formed to increase representation of Black people in British motorsports. The commission earlier this month published its first report that included

10 recommendations for change. "Diverse workforces are not only more successful but are also the morally correct approach for any industry," Hamilton said. "The findings of The Hamilton Commission have provided us a fantastic base to begin our work, and I am confident that Ignite will result in real, tangible change within motorsport."

"For 15 years, I have remained one of the few Black employees within Formula 1, and I am proud that my work with Mer-



Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton of Britain celebrates on the podium after winning the British Formula One Grand Prix, at the Silverstone circuit, in Silverstone, England, Sunday, July 18, 2021.

Associated Press

cedes is going to change that for the better." Ignite will focus its work

on developing a pipeline of diverse talent in motorsports. □

Biles withdraws from gymnastics final to protect team, self



Simone Biles, of the United States, watches gymnasts perform at the 2020 Summer Olympics, Tuesday, July 27, 2021, in Tokyo. Associated Press

By WILL GRAVES
AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Simone Biles arrived in Tokyo as the star of the U.S. Olympic movement and perhaps the Games themselves. She convinced herself she was prepared for the pressure. That she was ready to carry the burden of outsized expectations. Only, as the women's gymnastics team final approached on Tuesday night, something felt off. And the athlete widely considered the Greatest of All Time in her sport knew it. So rather than push through the doubts that crept into her head as she's done so many times in the past, Biles decided enough was enough. She was done. For now. The American star withdrew from the competition following one rotation, opening the door for the team of Russian athletes to win gold for the first time in nearly three decades. Jordan Chiles, Sunisa Lee and Grace McCallum guided the U.S. to silver while Biles cheered from the sideline in a white sweatsuit, at peace with a decision that revealed a shift not only in

Biles but perhaps the sport she's redefined. "We also have to focus on ourselves, because at the end of the day we're human, too," Biles said. "So, we have to protect our mind and our body, rather than just go out there and do what the world wants us to do." The Americans — fueled by an uneven bars routine by Lee that not even Biles could match — drew within eight-tenths of a point through three rotations. ROC, however, never wavered on floor. And they erupted when 21-year-old Angelina Melnikova's score assured them of the top spot on the podium for the first time since the Unified Team won in Barcelona in 1992. The victory came a day after ROC men's team edged Japan for the top spot in the men's final. Great Britain edged Italy for bronze. In the five years since Biles and the U.S. put on a dazzling display on their way to gold in Rio de Janeiro, gymnastics has undergone a reckoning. The tectonic plates in a sport where obedience, discipline and silence were

long considered as important as talent and artistry are moving. Biles has become an outspoken advocate for athlete's rights and the importance of proper mental health. There was a time, there were many times actually, where she felt she wasn't right and just powered through because that's what people expected of her. Not anymore. And the stand she took could resonate far beyond the color of any medal she may win in Tokyo. Biles is the latest in a series of high-profile athletes, including tennis star Naomi Osaka, who have used their platforms to discuss their mental health struggles. A subject that was once taboo has become far more accepted and embraced. U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee CEO Sarah Hirshland applauded Biles for prioritizing her "mental wellness over all else" and offered the organization's full support. USA Gymnastics women's program vice-president called Biles' act "incredibly selfless." Biles posted on social media Monday that she felt

the weight of the world on her shoulders after an uncharacteristically sloppy showing during qualifying left the Americans looking up at the ROC on the scoreboard. The tension affected her practice. It affected her confidence. And when she stepped onto the vault runway, it finally found its way to her performance, too. She was scheduled to do an "Amanar" vault that requires a roundoff back handspring onto the table followed by 2 1/2 twists. Biles instead did just 1 1/2 twists with a big leap forward after landing. She sat down and talked to U.S. team doctor Marcia Faust, then headed to the back while the rest of the Americans moved on to uneven bars without her. When Biles returned several minutes later, she hugged her teammates and took off her bar grips. And just like that, her night was over. "To see her kind of go out like that is very sad because this Olympic Games, I feel like, is kind of hers," Lee said. Biles is scheduled to defend her Olympic title in the all-

around final on Thursday. She also qualified for all four event finals later in the Games. She said she will regroup on Wednesday before deciding whether to continue. Biles' abrupt absence forced the Americans to scramble a bit. The finals are a three-up/three-count format, meaning each country enters three of their four athletes on an apparatus, with all three scores counting. Chiles stepped in to take Biles' place on uneven bars and balance beam. The 20-year-old who made the team with her steady consistency pulled off a solid bars routine and drilled her balance beam set two days after falling twice on the event. Thanks in part to a little help from ROC — which counted a pair of falls on beam — the U.S. drew within striking distance heading to floor, the final rotation. Without Biles and her otherworldly tumbling, the U.S. needed to be near perfect to close the gap. It didn't happen. Chiles stumbled to the mat at the end of her second pass, and any chance the U.S. had of chasing down ROC went right along with it. Not that Chiles or the rest of the Americans particularly cared. The gold might be gone, but something more significant may have happened instead. It's a tradeoff they can live with. "This medal is definitely for (Biles)," said Chiles. "If it wasn't if it wasn't for her, we wouldn't be here where we are right now. We wouldn't be a silver medalist because of who she is as a person." Chiles then turned to her good friend. Biles helped convince her to move to Houston to train alongside her two years ago, a decision that turned Chiles into an Olympian. In an empty arena in the middle of Japan with the world watching, Chiles did for Biles what Biles has done for so many for so long. She had her back. "Kudos to you girl," Chiles said. "This is all for you." □